The Isaiah Thomas "Standing Bible"

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THE ISAIAH THOMAS "STANDING BIBLE"



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The Isaiah Thomas "Standing Bible"

BY

Douglas C. McMurtrie

29-12149

CHICAGO
PRIVATELY PRINTED
MCMXXVIII

Of this booklet, there have been printed in the month of October, 1928, two hundred and fifty copies only. The cover, title page, all display lines and folios are Ludlow-set in True-Cut Caslon and Ludlow borders and ornaments.

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The Isaiah Thomas "Standing Bible"

THE problem of the printer-publisher before the days of stereotyping and electrotyping, in determining the extent of a print order on a standard work, was a serious one. He could, of course, print as many as he chose at the time he ran the forms in succession as they were set up and later distributed in order to release the type for the composition of

subsequent forms. But if the sale were to extend over a considerable period, the investment in paper stock and labor would be too heavy to carry. It was, therefore, common practice to reset and reprint a standard work again and again, with much consequent waste of labor.

The editions of books printed by American printers during the eighteenth century were usually small, but as we enter the last decade of that period we find record of a number of editions of 10,000 and Thomas & Andrews of Boston printed at one time 20,000 copies of the first part of Noah Webster's Spelling Book. With an extensive book like the Bible, however, where the sale was continuous, the problem of edition quantity weighed against the cost of re-setting became more serious.

Isaiah Thomas of Worcester was one of the most capable and enterprising printers in the United States, being actively engaged in business in that city from 1775 to 1802. He conceived the idea of buying sufficient type to set up the entire Bible at one time, and hold it standing, so that it might be reprinted at convenience without expense for composition.

At the time Thomas was purchasing most of his type from the Fry foundry in London (successively Jos. Fry & Son, Edmund Fry & Co., and Fry, Steele & Co.). He asked Messrs. Fry to quote him on the type required to set a Bible in nonpareil and also asked them to ascertain what it would cost to have the composition done in London, and the tied-up pages shipped to the United States. This last provision was rendered desirable by the scarcity at the time of competent compositors in this country. Putting his own staff on the setting of a Bible would have unduly handicapped his other work.

Letters from Messrs. Fry preserved among the Isaiah Thomas papers in the splendid collection of the American Antiquarian Society at Worcester, give the details regarding the supply of type and the composition of the paper, and throw much light on the trade conditions of the period. The more important of these letters, not heretofore published, are transcribed herewith.

The first communication, in answer to the inquiry from Thomas, was written at the bottom of a long bill-head which shows the costs of type at the time:

Isaiah Thomas London, July 14th, 1790

To Edmund Fry & Co.

Letter-Founders to the Prince of Wales
Type-Street

To lb.				
462.0	Long Primer	1/6	£ 34.13 –	
378.8	Brevier	2/6	46.11.3	
78.12	Music	4/6	17.14.4-½	
39.12	Check, 2 Line Letters &c	1/	1.19.9	
9.3	Minion	3/6	1.12.2	
6 Doz.	Common Rule	6/	1.16.–	
2 Doz.	thick Dbe. Face Do	30/	3.– .–	
6	Boxes	2/	12 –	
			£107.18.6-½	

Augt. 12th, Charges viz:		
Entry & Searcher	£0.5.0	
Wharfage & Shiping	3.–	
Waterage 3/.		
Cartage 5/	8.–	
Bills of Lading & Primage	5.–	
Insurance	2.11.–	3.12.0
		£111.10.6-½

(Continued on bill-head at bottom)

My Esteemed Friend

Thy favor of the 21st of May last per the Mary, & duplicate per the Neptune are both received, enclosing first & second of Exchange, Montgomery on Gregory, for Twenty Five pounds Sterling, to the credit of thy Account. On presenting for acceptance it was refused, & of course noted, but when due was paid.

Inclosed is Bill of Lading of the above, per the Mary, Captain Tibbitts, by whom thou wilt receive this.

I have purchased the last Oxford Nonpareil Bible & sent it to 3 Printers to cast up; they agree at £5–10–0 per Sheet, composing, reading, correcting &c. there being 33 Sheets, it would amt. to £181–10–0, which after the Types are cast might be composed in 8 or 10 weeks.

There being about 800 Pages, & each page weighing lbs. 6-0 would be 4800 at Nonpareil at 5/– per lb.	£1200. – –
To be added for Emergencies 250 lbs. at 5/	62.10. –
	1262.10. –
To which add the Composing	181.10. –
	£1444. 0. 0

It will take up full 9 months to cast with six good hands constantly upon it, so that thou canst

not expect it in less than 12 mos. from the time we have the order.

It will not be convenient to give Credit for so large a Sum out of our Trade; but have no objection to let £500 to remain on security—for money on nonpareil we allow 10 per Cent Discount.

I am

Thy obliged friend

EDMUND FRY

Duplicate per packet

Thomas asked that the work be undertaken as proposed, and there are numerous letters from Fry running through 1795, advising Thomas of shipments of set-up pages of additional sheets of the Bible, asking for payments on account, and so forth. The first edition of the book did not appear until 1797. It had been planned, as we have seen, in 1791, and in his octavo Bible of 1793, Thomas advertised it as a Common School Bible to be printed on beautiful new type to be cast particularly for the purpose. It was a duodecimo, unpaged, with twenty-eight 24-page signatures in the Old Testament and twelve in the New Testament. The title-page read as follows:

The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments. Translated out of the Original

Tongues, and with the Former Translations Diligently Compared and Revised, by the Special Command of King James I of England. United States of Columbia, Printed at Worcester, Massachusetts, by Isaiah Thomas, 1797.

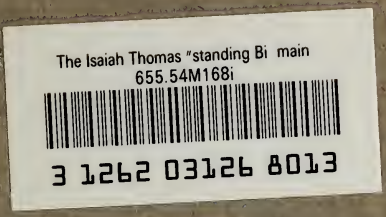
The volume was reprinted in 1798, 1799, and 1800.

Henry Lemoine, author of "Typographical Antiquities," writing in the *Gentleman's Magazine* (London, 1796, vol. 66, p. 915), on the state of printing in America mentions the shipment of type pages for this Bible. He writes: "Aitken, a printer there [Philadelphia], finished an American Bible; which tho highly approved, and recommended by a resolution of Congress, was a losing concern. Since this, a Bible for the pocket has been sent over, all composed, in metal, from Fry's, to be printed there upon their own paper."

Date Due

Due	Returned	Due	Returned
OCT 17 '61	NOV 28 '61		
MAY 21 '64	MAY 10 '64		

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